

## Students' Experience on Thesis Writing

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### Abstract

This article attempts to explore the Master's Level students experience on thesis writing. Two students who had just completed their thesis writing task had been taken as a sample of the study. In-depth interview was used as a tool for data collection. The interview was taken in two phases. The collected information through the in-depth interviews was transcribed and coded to develop the themes. Three themes were developed through this study ; thesis writing is challenging and rigorous task, English language has the supporting role in thesis writing and thesis writing as a platform for learning. Through the findings and results it had been concluded that thesis writing is not only inevitable but also desirable for the students of higher level.

**Key words :** Thesis writing, rigorous, communicative skills, learning platform.

### 1. Introduction

Thesis writing is a mandatory requirement for all students who are pursuing a Master's Degree in Education in the faculty of Education (FOE), Tribhuvan University (TU). Regardless of their specialization subjects, students should write a thesis in the fourth semester , selecting a research topic or issue from the area of their specialization and undertaking research and writing in a given format and style. In specific, the 6-credit thesis course aims to enable students to acquire in-depth knowledge and skills for developing research proposal, conducting research and writing a thesis in a standard format.

Thesis writing has been an inevitable part for the Masters level students. Since they must be able to cope with the every difficulty that occur in course of thesis writing. Many students perceive it as a hard work. Students should have patient, rigorous and hard-working to complete thesis writing tasks. Thesis writing is mandatory for all categories of students

who are pursuing Master degrees in education. Under Master degree program students are expected to conduct research to meet the partial fulfillment of their masters' degrees' requirements. Students of Masters level studies Research Methodologies subjects in their semesters. However, many of the students have been experiencing some challenges in writing the master thesis. This is because most of the students may not have the skills required to write the thesis research. This paper therefore explored the students' experiences in writing the theses research in education by the students of fourth semester who have just completed their thesis research.

In the global scenario, general concerns have been raised by various stakeholders in diverse higher education contexts about the quality of theses and dissertations. It is often reported by quality of theses and dissertations turned in for partial fulfillment of higher educational degrees were generally low. Most of the students are found copying and pasting their works from web sites. Their works seem impressive but have little or no relation to their studies. The study aimed to investigate the observed experiences of the students studying in Tribhuvan University in Nepal.

It is believed that such experiences may help unmask challenges being encountered by students as well as exposing the students' limitations in conduction research. The information to be obtained may then be used to design mitigation strategies, enable future students at the University to complete their theses successfully. Diverse students have been conducted in attempts to discover the experiences of various levels of students in writing theses. Some of them illustrated that challenges faced by postgraduate students while writing their theses included time constraints, language barrier, difference in socio-cultural environment, low research supervisor's commitment and insufficient research facilities and materials (Claudius, 2016; Yeoh & Terry, 2013; Chang, 2006). In addition, other researchers have noted that the postgraduate students have been faced by some difficulties like lack of research skills, poor selection of thesis topics, family and financial difficulties (Ekpoh, 2016; Ismail, Abidden & Hassan, 2011).

Studies in higher education constitute course work, dissertation/theses, and research degrees. Regardless of the kind of study students undertake, they are required to conduct researches to demonstrate their mastery of the area of study. Illustrated by studies conducted in related field, it was realized that students often faced three key challenges in their thesis writing process; ‘ the research design, the data collecting and processing and the report writing’(Lessing &Schulze, 2003; Helm, 1989). These three major aspects comprised the key components of the theses/dissertations writing process. The research design which may include the array of plans and structure of the thesis determines the success or failure of whole research work. It is where students state and clearly define how the research would be carried out. As such, a good and an appropriate design connotes relevant findings in the research project and the vice-versa. On the other hand, the data collection and analysis constitute an important aspect of the thesis document. Collecting the right data, from whom to collect the data and where can be challenging for the students.

The final aspect, which consist of the data analysis and reporting nonetheless is an all-important aspect of the research thesis. Owing to the nature of studies grounded on diverse sociocultural perspectives of learning, choosing the right analysis procedure also hinder students in completing successfully their higher degree programs. In one aspect, the analysis procedure that merit a particular study can be complicated for students, as such, the data analysis cannot be reported. Good analysis of research data delineates easy and appropriate reporting of finding and discussion. If a student chooses a wrong data analysis procedure for a particular data, it connotes that, the findings may not fit the study which can affect the quality of the thesis. It can be argued that majority of students with the international students included find the whole process of thesis and dissertation writing challenging as an academic task.(Huang,2007). It is therefore necessary to examine such challenge and make recommendations that might possible resolve the situation among students.

Kaakinen (2017) found that positive peer group influence helps the post graduate students to overcome the challenges in writing their thesis research. That is, seeking

assistant from course mates, friends, seniors who may have experienced the research procedures in one way or the other fundamentally have significant effects on theses writing of the students. This according to the researcher arouses and maintains students' confidence in academic and research works as it boosts their efforts in completing their theses and dissertations before deadlines.

While writing thesis different skills are needed. Some of the inevitable skills that are necessary for thesis writing are critical reading skill, research skills, problem solving skill, communication skill, numerical skill, calm under pressure and management skills. Some students can be found disappointing while they are unable to cope with the obstacles. Hence, the researcher has chosen this very problem to investigate the students experience of thesis writing through this study.

### **1.1 The Concept of Writing**

It is quite possible for second-language learners like Nepali to find it difficult to gain and generate their writing ideas or to focus their attention on a specific topic when they are told to write, and even to find it impossible for students to write a paragraph that is the basis of written competence. According to White in Dwihandini et.al (2013) stated that writing is not easy. As a result based on his research found that, in the second language learners face the most difficulties in writing skills to develop. Writing is one way to demonstrate opinions in order to interact with others. A writer can express his / her thoughts or opinions on the paper by writing. Leo (2007: 1) states that writing as a mechanism for expressing ideas or thoughts in words should be undertaken at our leisure.

Writing is difficult for a variety of reasons. According to Tarigan (1985: 5) writing is a productive ability to write and to communicate indirectly, and the concept of the character is very different from that communicated by speaking directly, thus writing requires the ability to write. Beside that Harmer (2004) also state writing is a form of communication that can be conveyed or expresses through written form. Writing is a process of imagination in the form of writing language to spill out ideas. Sometimes refers to the outcomes of writing innovation by the word writing or even essay. Even though there is an opinion that



says both terms have different understandings, both terms apply to the same result. The word writing itself is also connected to a scientific-type method of creativity.

## 1.2 The Definition of Writing Thesis

Writing thesis is a process in completing the Master's program in University that students should do. Hardling (2004) argues that "Writing a thesis is an activity in working about study and writing a description of a certain research effort." Brookes and Grundy (1991: 106) notice that the majority of students who write a thesis would attempt to demonstrate a series of consequences for the student theory. However, the difficulty of writing a thesis could be related to the purpose of education. The results of the research and the overall analysis based on the specified percentage.

In order to write a good thesis, we need to recognize the main points by writing a good thesis. Blaxter et.al (1998: 145) discusses the significant points in writing as a successful thesis: the learners will have to know and produce the idea or ideas about what they want to write; students do need to take guidance from relevant topic experts who are specialists in their field as experts have already done so itself, Or should be in a condition to assess the standpoint of the students. Eventually, the learners need to continue slightly with their writing thesis.

According to Bella (2010) thesis is a type of science writing that is used as the final activity of students who, in the form of written papers, make use of a scientific method that aims to achieve a certain degree of university education. In the rules of writing, regular and structured and accountable to the lecturers and examiners. The higher the standard of the dissertation is achieved, the more established the skill of the person who did it to master the discipline of science.

Beside that Ikmal (2014) stated that thesis is a research study that demonstrates new knowledge by performing a hypothesis check. For example, there is a theory or something that is still a presumption and needs to be tested for its validity, a presumption check. Thesis was published to receive the Master's degree.



the topic there are several things the researcher must be note: first is the researcher should be interest to the topic, the researcher mastered or had a prior understanding of what was to be raised topic, researchers should pay attention to how many journals on the topic itself, topics to be raised should be important to the community and the last is topics that will be adopt must be beneficial for the researcher and others in the future.

## **2. Read a Previous Research Journals**

Reading is the crucial activity in the educational world. Where, from reading we can get the knowledge testing that we did not know before. In writing a thesis, reading a previous research journal is one of the very important activities. Here are some of the benefits gained when reading previous research journals:

- a. Researchers should provide an overview of the subject. Such as: Researchers can get a description of the techniques to be used in the research process , researchers know the relationship between the papers to be read and the study to be performed, or researchers can find out if the study is going to be long or fresh.
- b. Help researchers to develop research theories and focus on the substance of the thesis itself.
- c. Throughout this level, researchers are also developing skills such as being able to critically review literature in order to find possible limitations or helping the researcher to establish the researcher's own point of view.

## **3. Research Plan (Drafting)**

Planning is a method of thinking about the actions required to achieve the desired goal. The first and most important activity is the achievement of the intended result. This involves the production and management of a system, such as psychological aspects requiring analytical skills. There are also a few tests to determine someone's ability to plan well. Here are the several steps to make drafting

- a. Introduction, it includes a general plan on the work to be carried out. With the progress of the research itself, this initial design will evolve.
- b. Significant of the research, is the section on the importance of the study provides the reader with information about how the study can contribute. Nonetheless, it must be explicitly mentioned what the study will contribute and who will benefit from it.
- c. Research question, the research question is at the base of a research, study or literature review project. It focuses on the study, defines the methodology, and guides all stages of investigation, analysis and interpretation.
- d. List of references, according to Anne (2010 : 3) a bibliography is a list of books, scientific articles, statements, private documents, diaries, interviews, rules, letters, blogs, and other references that you use while researching a subject and writing a document. At the end, the bibliography appears. Bibliography records must be presented in a very particular setting, although this format may depend on the unique style of writing that the writer has practice. The instructor or publisher will ask which type to use, and most academic papers will include MLA, American Psychological Association (APA), Chicago (author-date references or footnotes / endnotes) or Turabian type.

#### **4. Revise the Research**

Start this at least a week before the paper is needed. In fact, researchers would not have to wait until have a complete first draft to start a revision. Authors may also edit individual paragraphs after authors have finished so. Until making a revision, the author should understand when and how to correct it by providing input on each sentence, then concentrate on every sentence that has been written, It is means there is little we can apply the most rational sentences and delete it.

### 3. Method

This study is based on an interpretative research paradigm because it assumes a relativist ontology, a subjective epistemology, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative study is based on phenomenological study that is based on the lived experience of the students who have completed their thesis writing task. Defining phenomenology, Maruna and Butler (2005,p.2) write, ‘Phenomenology... simply refers to the description and understanding of lived human experience through observable forms of immediate cognitive experience and reflective analysis.’ The phenomenological approach is viewed as the highly appropriate means to research human experience (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000) due to which this design was selected for this study.

To explore Master’s Level English students’ experience on thesis writing, I selected two Master’s Level Fourth Semester English Education students purposively who had just completed their thesis writing task as the participants. Phenomenological samples are nearly always purposive (Clark, 1988 as cited in Whitehead, 2002 p.499). The participants were from the Rupandehi district who had been doing their Masters from Bhairahawa Multiple Campus , Bhairahawa.

After informing the objectives and confidential nature of the study, both of the participants provided their verbal consent to take part in this study. After the consent, I arranged a time for interviews and took in-depth interviews from both of the participants in two different phases. In the first phase, both of the participants were interviewed and their interviews were audio-recorded taking their permission. I used the open-question „funnel“ technique while taking interviews. The „funnel“ technique of interview which was described by Cohen and Manion (1989), starts the interview process with general non-threatening questions that are designed to place the interviewee at ease in the initial stages and after the interviewee appears to have relaxed, the focus of further questions becomes more specific and knowledge-intensive (Whitehead, 2002). After transcribing the recorded interviews, I realized that some important points related to the experience of participants which were crucial to this study were missing. So, I arranged the next phase of interviews to include

some more points related to the participants' experience. Then, I embedded the data gathered through the second phase in the interviews taken in the first phase.

The thematic analysis method was used to analyze data. This is a method for "identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Six phases of data analysis of thematic analysis as presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to analyze the data and present the report of the themes. Accordingly, in the first phase, I transcribed all the interviews and became familiar with my data reading and re-reading them. Then, coding of data in a systematic fashion from both transcribes was done. In other words, I generated initial codes. After generating initial codes, I collated codes into potential three themes and their subthemes and gathered all data relevant to each potential theme and subthemes. Then, the themes were reviewed to make sure if the themes work. Finally, the themes were given names, and the report was produced.

## **2. Findings and Discussion**

The paper examined the thesis writing experiences and coping strategies among Master's Level students in Nepal. The data taken through in-depth interview were transcribed and coded thematically into the following themes; Rigorous and Challenging Journey; Proficiency in English Language; Platform for Learning Life Skills.

### **2.1 Rigorous and Challenging Journey**

Thesis writing is not a work done overnight. It is a rigorous journey. Students encounter a lot of obstacles while writing thesis. They should work hard continuously until they complete their tasks. Most of the students seem suffering in the different phases of thesis writing. Students seem to be scared with the word 'thesis' like a ghost. Thesis phobia can be seen in their eyes.

In a query, how they felt while writing thesis, the participants of the study shared their experiences from the time of topic selection. They said it was very difficult for them to choose the topic. They also claimed it took three weeks for them to decide their area of the study. According to them, they went through the different theses to frame their title,



consulted so many books and took the advice of their guide. Regarding the experience of the thesis writing, one of the participants Sabitra (pseudonym) recalled;

*I became so much worried while selecting the topic of my thesis. I thought the classes of my different teachers, the contents that I learnt in the different semesters. I talked to my friends about the thesis title. I felt that I knew nothing .Initially, I got puzzled and confused.*[Sabitra,18 April 2022]

Through this view, what we can infer is thesis writing is not easy task for the students. They feel anxiety and are confused at the different stages of writing. Students struggle for writing and making their writing best. Tiwari (2019) found that due to lack of proper guidance of the thesis supervisors and the students' incomplete knowledge of research methodology , a large number of students face many challenges during the time of writing thesis in English education. The findings revealed that students are extremely frustrated with behaviour of the supervisors during the time of thesis writing.

Similarly, the thesis writing task takes long time. Hence, students need patient on them. They should be able to resist each and every difficulties that occur on the way. On this regard, Sabitra stated;

*At the beginning what I thought was I could complete my task within a month but it was pity to say that I was not able to frame the title within the month. Since I didn't have the habit of reading and analyzing the things. I was confined within course book and power point slides before. By the end of completing the writing I came to know that thesis writing work is not one shot deal.* [Sabitra, 18 April 2022)

This implies that thesis writing process is continuous process. It takes long time. Thesis writing is a tedious task for the students. One needs to know subject matter thoroughly to explain every research question related to a paper. Thesis writing is a stepwise and systematic technique. Continuous labour is needed to achieve a goal.

## **2.2 Proficiency in English Language**

Though the participants were English Education students. They emphasizes the importance

of having good command over English language. Mastery of the English Language connotes some level of ease in successfully writing up theses among the students. Most of the students are found to be struggling owing to their poor pronunciation and general grammar rules of the English Language.

A participant stated that *'English language is the main medium of instruction or language of discourse of this programme in this campus, and of course I am not a native English speaker. English is used as a foreign language in Nepal. I have had many challenges in the language here using it professionally and academically. For instance, when I wrote the thesis and submitted to the supervisor, he identified many grammatical errors including sentence constructions and others.'* [Saraswoti, 18 April 2022]

Another participant shared similar challenge about the English language proficiency confirming the situation as a serious barrier to thesis writing and general academic activities among the students of English Education. *'Yes, English is the medium of instruction in this programme and I encounter some problems since it was not the first language in my country. Especially, with grammar in itself, I have had some challenges in writing academic papers since I began studies in this master programme at this campus.'* [Sabitra, 18 April 2022]

Now with the help of above interviews what we can deduce is English language plays the vital roles in thesis writing. If students have sound competency over English, they can do better in thesis writing. If not they have the challenge to understand the and make the meaning out of the what they read.

### **2.3 Platform for Learning Life skills**

Thesis writing provides the room for the learners to learn many skills. Since without developing the skills they cannot cross the path of thesis writing. Critical reading skill, collaborative skill, communication skill, evaluation skill are some of them.

One of the participants stated;

*Talking to my personal experience in thesis writing, I experience a way of learning when selecting research topic, planning for data collection and writing process and I*

*learned to struggle and enjoy. Thesis writing has taught me the life skills like how to face the adversity in life; how to deal with the people with diversified background; how to cope with problems and so on. [Sabitra,18 April 2022]*

Thesis writing teaches the students learning by doing . It makes the students analytical and critical. The learners becomes empowered and autonomous in their works. As one of the participants stated above she learnt to become self-regulated and independent. It signifies the importance of thesis writing through which students become regulated and investigator.

On this regard the next participant stated her views as;

*Through my research journey , I learnt to be patient. It made me creative. Now I knew that research is systematic and stepwise procedure. As a researcher, I learnt to think critically, paraphrase idea and construct it by playing with words. I experienced writing a thesis is the most important part of my journey to achieve the Master's degree. It led me from anxiety to creation. It ultimately helped me enter the academic world. [Saraswati, 18 April 2022]*

Through this remarks of the student what we can infer is thesis writing is not only the inevitable but also desirable for the students in the higher level. Since it opens the doors for stepping out in the world of the knowledge. It teaches different skills and empowers the learners.

Hence, it is an unavoidable part for the higher studies.

### **3. Conclusions**

Thesis writing is an unavoidable part of higher education. One can't avoid it if he/she wants to complete his/her higher studies. It is an prolonged and challenging journey in the sense that so many steps should be crossed while writing thesis. Thesis writing can be stressful in the initial phase of writing but later it can be enjoyable when the students have the mastery over the skills needed for the thesis writing.

Good commanding over the English language can be of great help for the students. Since they could read the many materials and get wild exposure on the given topic .

Likewise, it helps to build the confidence on the part of the learners. Thesis writing not only the writing task but also the learning of so many skills and strategies needed for the knowledge construction. Hence, thesis writing has been desirable for the higher studies.

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